

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 271

HE 021 107

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TITLE Successfully Negotiating the Graduate School Process:  
A Guide for Minority Students.  
INSTITUTION National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for  
Minorities in Engineering, Inc., Notre Dame, IN.  
PUB DATE May 85  
NOTE 4lp.  
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reference  
Materials - General (130)  
  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS \*Admission Criteria; American Indians;  
Assistantships; Black Students; Check Lists; \*College  
Admission; College Applicants; College Choice;  
\*College Entrance Examinations; \*College Students;  
Degrees (Academic); Doctoral Programs; Fellowships;  
Graduate Students; \*Graduate Study; Higher Education;  
Hispanic Americans; Mexican Americans; \*Minority  
Groups; Puerto Ricans; Questionnaires; Self  
Evaluation (Individuals); Student Educational  
Objectives; Student Financial Aid

ABSTRACT

Intended for minority students (American Indians, Black Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans) who may be contemplating graduate study, this guide provides information in a question-and-answer format on the graduate admission process. The following topics are addressed: (1) who should consider a graduate degree (includes a self-assessment form); (2) time frame for planning; (3) advantages of graduate school; (4) academic standards; (5) evaluating institutions and programs; (6) obtaining information about universities; (7) types of degrees; (8) determination of costs and types and sources of financial aid; (9) the admissions process and how to apply (includes a calendar checklist); (10) admission criteria; (11) names, addresses and phone numbers for admissions examinations; and (12) letters of recommendation, personal interviews, application fees, writing a statement of purpose, and other aspects of admission and acceptance. A glossary of terms concerning graduate education is also provided. (KM)

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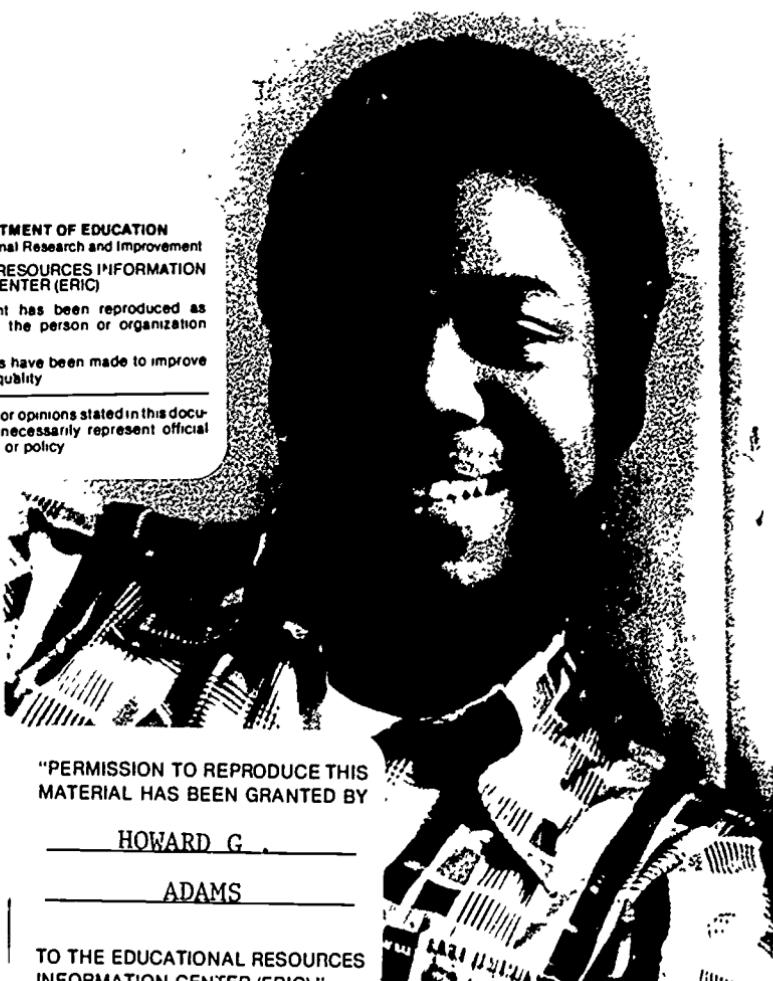
# SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATING THE GRADUATE SCHOOL PROCESS: A GUIDE FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

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ADAMS

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By Howard G. Adams, Ph.D. May, 1985

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was written by Howard G. Adams. It was edited by Ettore A. Peretti and typed by Rosemary Leake.

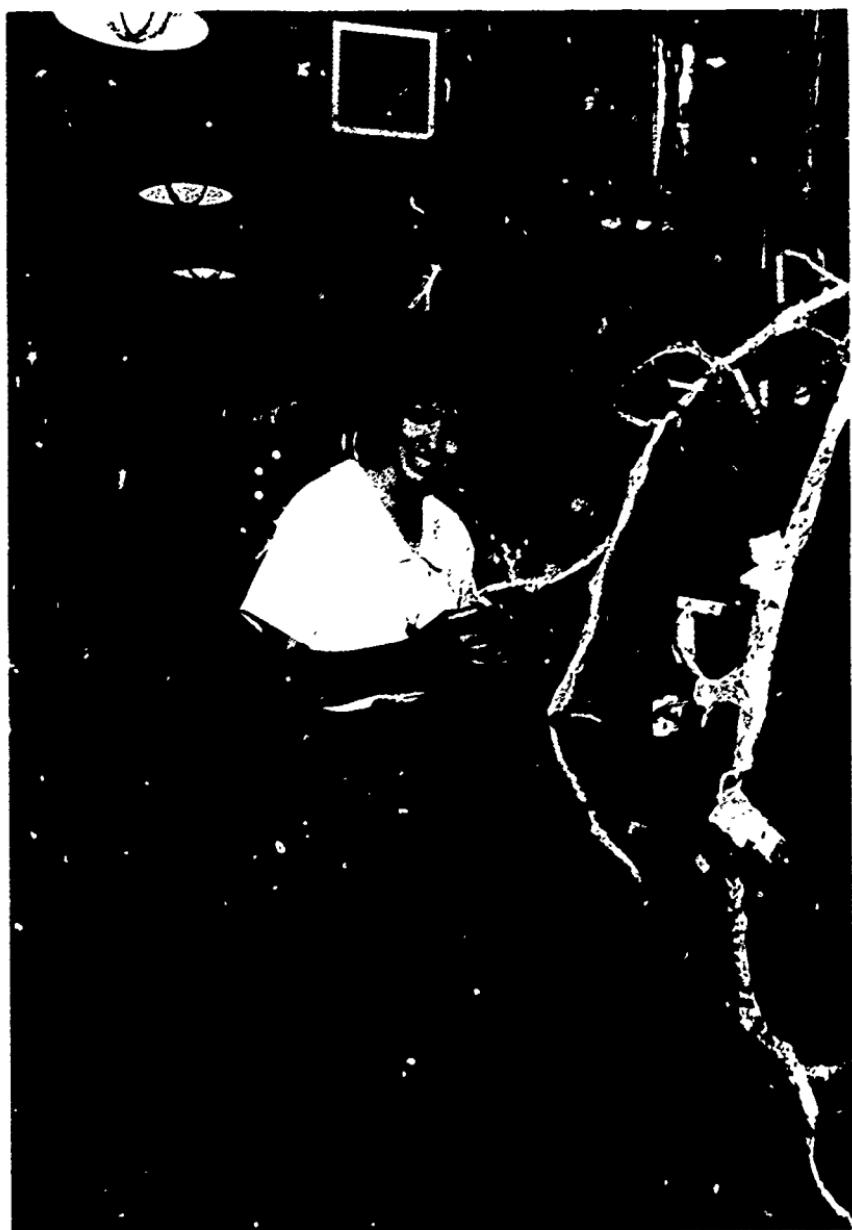
The manual is based on lessons learned during the implementation of the GEM Program. It is designed for use of minority students, present and future, in their efforts to find opportunities to pursue graduate study

Publication of this guide was made possible by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

It must be borne in mind that the tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal, the tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but a calamity not to dream. It's not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideals, but is a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It's not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim, is a sin.

■ Dr. Benjamin E. Mays

Published by National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering, Inc. (GEM), PO. Box 537, Notre Dame, IN 46556, (219) 239-7183



## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1976, the GEM Program has had as its mission to encourage minority students to consider graduate study at the master's level in engineering.

Through our involvement with minority students, we have become aware of the shortage of pertinent information on negotiating the graduate admission process. When information is available, it tends to be conflicting and confusing.

This guide has been written as a response to the preconceived informational needs of minority students (American Indians, Black Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans) who might be contemplating going to graduate school. It has been written in question-and-answer format and is intended to provide factual information on the "How's" and "Why's" of the graduate admission process. In the guide, students will find answers to such questions as:

- Why graduate school?
- How can I find financial support for graduate study?
- What are the various graduate admission tests?
- How do I choose the right program and institution?
- What is the admission process like?

Throughout the guide, the term "graduate study" will be used to include both graduate and professional school programs.

We hope talented minority students will find in this guide counsel and guidance for a better understanding of graduate study. Successfully negotiating the graduate admission process takes savvy - knowing the right questions to ask and to whom. In this guide, we hope to provide both the questions and the answers.

To make future editions of the guide more helpful, we would like to add suggestions from our readers. Those wishing to share suggestions may do so by writing to Howard G. Adams, GEM Program, PO Box 537, Notre Dame, IN 46556.



# **W**ho should consider pursuing a graduate degree?

There is no clear, neat answer to this question. To attend or pass on graduate school is an individual decision and should be made in conjunction with one's overall career/life-goal plans.

In deciding between full-time graduate study immediately after attaining the B.S. degree and full-time employment, one must consider a number of personal factors. These will include: abilities - a realistic assessment of your chances to successfully complete an advanced degree program, career goals - what you hope to vocationally accomplish during your work life, financial resources - your ability to handle the cost of tuition and fees, living expenses, and loss of income which you would have earned had you taken full-time employment, motivation - the will to tackle a single-minded endeavor that will demand total time and effort.

The challenge of graduate study is a demanding one and should be accepted by those who enjoy the rigor of disciplined long and sometimes lonely hours of hard work.

For many students, the decision to pursue graduate education is made to either obtain specialized training and credentials in a certain area or to expand employment options. These are noble reasons, but may not be sufficient to sustain the drive necessary to persevere in graduate school. It is, therefore, important for each individual to make the singular commitment to pursue graduate work and once made to devote total effort, energy, and time to completing the task of the degree.

Some important questions to consider when thinking about attending graduate school are

- Why do I want to attend graduate school?
- What are my goals, objectives and expectations for graduate work?
- What are my plans after graduate school?
- How will a graduate degree affect my future career plans and goals?
- How will I survive financially while in graduate school?
- Are the rewards for having an advanced degree worth the effort?

If, after weighing the various pros and cons of "Why Graduate School?" a student still finds graduate study an attractive option, then go for it.

**S**ince my sophomore year, I've been considering graduate studies, but as a senior I'm still a bit apprehensive. Is this a common feeling?

Electing to pursue graduate studies is a more personal decision than undergraduate education, since fewer people attempt to obtain an advanced degree. So having feelings of apprehension and uncertainty may be a natural part of evaluating your options.

The process of assessing your options through self-assessment, questioning and then making a final decision is a valuable experience.

The ten-item self-assessment form that follows is designed to help you decide if graduate school is for you. Working through the items should give you insight into your motivation, need, and commitment for graduate study.



## SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

Yes                  No

- Do I need an advanced degree to begin my career?
- Do I enjoy rigorous academic work that requires total time and effort?
- Are my research skills such that I can define, implement, and carry out an original research project?
- Am I willing to forego income for the additional period needed to complete the advanced degree without being overly frustrated?
- Have I given enough thought to the type of degree I want to pursue - M.S., M.B.A., Ph.D., J.D., etc.?
- Do I qualify for admission based on my grade point average, test scores and/or educational prerequisites?
- Would having an advanced degree give me any advantages over my competition?
- Do I have undergraduate loan obligations, and if so, can I get those deferred until I complete the advanced degree?
- Is there fellowship assistance available in the area of my interest or will I have to take on the extra time burden of working as a teaching or research assistant to finance my graduate study?
- Have I realistically assessed my chances for successfully completing an advanced degree program?

## **W**

hen should I begin making plans for graduate school?

The sooner the better, and definitely by spring of the junior year of undergraduate study. Far too many students wait until their senior year to decide to pursue graduate study following graduation.

Waiting until the senior year can limit one's opportunities and eliminate some choices of programs such as medicine, law, and dentistry, which often require that some materials be filed during the junior year.

Students whose career plans include graduate study should begin exploring opportunities and options during the first two years of undergraduate study. Then, early during the junior year, gather information about the particular school/program of interest, take the appropriate admission test, and start a credential file.

For those students who are already seniors or recent graduates, it is not too late. Get started by making application and following through on the application process.

## **W**

ill attending graduate school help me in my career . . . to get a better job?

Attending graduate school can help you expand your knowledge, acquire new skills, and round out your undergraduate education. However, having a graduate degree will not guarantee that you will have an easier time finding a job.

The two areas that receive the most comments from advanced degree holders when asked what they considered to be the advantages of attending graduate school were:

- Increased earning power over one's life-time
- More satisfaction with work and accomplishments

Other results often reported include:

- Gains in self-esteem.
- More risk-taking and inviting of challenges
- Ability to manage others more effectively

- More effective leadership abilities
- Increased clarity in career direction
- More responsibility in job assignment

## W [REDACTED]

hat are the academic standards for graduate students?

Most graduate schools use the A-B-C-D-F grading scale for courses and "pass-fail" for thesis and dissertation research.

To obtain graduate credit, most institutions require a minimum grade of C in all courses. In addition, most schools require the graduate student to maintain an overall cumulative grade point average (GPA) of B to receive an advanced degree.

Students who fail to maintain the required GPA for graduation are usually placed on probation and may even be dropped from the graduate school. Students placed on probation are given one semester to raise their GPA to minimum requirement.

Make sure you understand the academic standards for the institution you plan to attend. Specifically, make sure you understand (1) the minimum grade required to receive credit for each course, and (2) the minimum GPA required to graduate with an advanced degree.

**H**ow can I evaluate those institutions and academic programs in which I have interest?

There are many factors to consider when selecting the proper graduate school, such as whether your interest lies in psychology, engineering, business, law, medicine, or another field.

Where you do your graduate work can make a real difference in the value of your credentials upon receiving an advanced degree. So seek out those programs that have earned a reputation for excellence in your particular area of interest.

Some questions to ask about the university or program you are considering.

- Does the faculty exhibit special strengths and research qualities through their graduate advisees, published works, and funded research?
- Are the libraries, laboratories, computers and other research facilities adequate for your educational needs?
- Are the graduates of the school/program sought by recruiters?
- Does the department of interest offer sufficiently large and varied curriculum to allow you a broad offering of courses and options?
- How senior are the professors in your area, what are their interests and what will their availability be?
- What are the degree requirements? Number of hours required? Will I have to do a thesis/dissertation?
- Is financial support available?
- Are support services adequate to make campus life conducive to the needs of the minority students?
- How long will it take for me to complete my program?
- How are advisors assigned/selected? Will I have a choice in who my major advisor will be?
- Are study space/office carrels available for graduate students?

The national reputation of a school is determined by the quality of its faculty, library holdings, research facilities and success of its graduates.

A number of survey publications rank the country's graduate schools using a wide range of criteria. One of the best sources for current ranking is periodic surveys published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Additional information can be obtained by consulting the publication *Graduate Programs and Admissions Manual*, sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States. This publication is designed to provide students with up-to-date information on degrees offered by various graduate schools throughout the United States. It gives an overview of each school by listing the school's size, number of degrees awarded by departments, faculty-student ratio, and admission requirements.

All students should take advantage of graduate study career fairs. Such fairs present an excellent opportunity to meet with representatives of various schools to seek information for comparison on various programs.





**W**hat about campus life? How can I decide which offers the best environment for me?

Graduate studies, unlike undergraduate education, involve much more time in the library, laboratory, or in the department with colleagues. However, it is still important to find answers to certain basic questions to discover the unique features of each campus for graduate students.

- Does the university have graduate student housing? What is the cost? How does one qualify for consideration?
- Is there suitable off-campus housing close by the campus?
- If you are married with a family, what about child care? The public school system? Employment opportunities for your spouse?
- What health service/health plan is available to graduate students? What is the cost?
- What types of social/cultural/intellectual activities of interest to graduate students occur on campus? In the surrounding community?
- Does the institution have someone within the graduate school specifically designated to address concerns of minority graduate students?

**C**an I influence universities to send me information on their programs?

Yes, by registering with the Minority Graduate Student Locater Service sponsored by the Graduate Record Examination Board. The Locater Service matches a student's qualifications and interest with the recruiting aims of certain graduate and professional schools throughout the nation. Students who register with this service receive information from schools across the country with programs for which they have indicated an interest.

The service is free and students may register with the Minority Graduate Student Locater Service directly by writing to the Graduate Record Examination, Educational Testing Service, Box 2615, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

**W**hat are the various types of graduate and professional degrees? The terms "graduate and professional schools," while quite similar, are not the same and offer different preparation and different degrees. Graduate schools offer academic degrees, usually the master's (the Master of Arts – M.A. or A.M., or the Master of Science – M.S. or S.M.) or the doctorate (the Doctor of Philosophy – Ph.D., or the Doctor of Education – Ed.D.).



On the other hand, professional schools are designed to prepare graduates to enter specific professional careers such as business, dentistry, law, medicine or the ministry. The most common degrees in these areas are the Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.), Doctor of Dental Science or Dental Surgery (D.D.S.), Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.), and the Doctor of Medicine (M.D.).

Some of the most widely sought degrees are:

<b>Master of Arts</b>	<b>Doctor of Jurisprudence</b>
A.M./M.A.	J.D.
<b>Certificate of Advanced Studies – C.A.S.</b>	<b>Master of Business Administration – M.B.A.</b>
<b>Doctor of Arts</b>	<b>Doctor of Medicine</b>
D.A.	M.D.
<b>Doctor of Dental Science or Doctor of Dental Surgery – D.D.S.</b>	<b>Master of Fine Arts</b>
	M.F.A.
<b>Doctor of Fine Arts</b>	<b>Master of Hospital Administration – M.H.A.</b>
D.F.A.	
<b>Doctor of Library Science</b>	<b>Master of Library Science</b>
D.L.S.	M.L.A.
<b>Doctor of Nursing Science</b>	<b>Master of Public Administration – M.P.A.</b>
D.N.S.	
<b>Doctor of Public Administration – D.P.A</b>	<b>Master of Public Health</b>
	M.P.H.
<b>Doctor of Public Health</b>	<b>Master of Social Work</b>
D.P.H.	M.S.W.
<b>Doctor of Social Work</b>	<b>Doctor of Science</b>
D.S.W.	S.D.
<b>Doctor of the Science of Law – D.Sc.l.</b>	<b>Master of Theology</b>
	Th.M.
<b>Doctor of Veterinary Medicine – D.V.M.</b>	<b>Doctor of Theology</b>
	Th.D.
<b>Doctor of Education</b>	<b>Master of Science</b>
Ed.D.	M.S.
	<b>Doctor of Philosophy</b>
	Ph.D.

## **W**hat should I ask about costs and financial aid?

Generally, each institution that you write will send you a catalog and financial aid brochure to provide specific information about institutional costs and financial-aid programs. However, because of the diversity of financial-aid programs and the wide range of institutional costs, you should be sure to seek answers to the following questions:

- What will the total cost be each term?
- Are there any costs, such as activity fees, which are optional?
- When must my total bill be paid each term?
- What types of financial aid are available to me?
- To apply for financial aid, what application forms must I file?
- What is the deadline for applying for financial aid?
- For fellowship/assistantship recipients, what is the duration of the award? To remain eligible for continuation? Obligations?

## **W**hat kinds of financial assistance are available?

Numerous sources of financial assistance are available for students to pursue graduate study. Student support funds are available in two categories, support based on academic excellence (merit based) and support based on financial need (need based).

Most graduate students are supported by their respective departments through assistantships which are given out on the basis of merit (academic promise and performance).

The following are major categories of graduate and professional school aid:

**Fellowship** A fellowship is a form of financial aid comparable to a college scholarship. It is a grant of money for which no work is required, and can cover part or all of tuition and usually includes a stipend to cover living support.

### **Assistantship**

A form of financial aid in which the graduate student is paid for work performed; often related to the student's studies or area of specialization. There are basically two types of assistantships. (a) **Research Assistantship** (RA) which pays a student to assist a professor on an experiment or research project; and (b) **Teaching Assistantship** (TA) which pays a student to teach, conduct a lab, or to help grade papers or examinations.

You should check with the financial aid office in the office of the graduate school where you apply. Each school's financial aid brochure should have a listing of the various fellowship funds and application procedures.

**I**n addition to the university aid that might be available, students should look to external funding sources for support. Following are sources of fellowship support for graduate study. There are many others, however, and students should ask their advisor or the graduate recruiter to help identify those for which they might qualify. All students are strongly urged to apply early in their academic year, since many of the fellowship programs have early deadline dates.

## Fellowship Programs

### Where to Write:

#### American Association of University

**Women Fellowships:** a one-year fellowship for women completing their dissertations.

Director

AAUW Fellowship Program

2401 Virginia Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20037

#### American Psychological Association

**Fellowships:** for minority group members entering or continuing graduate studies in psychology.

Director

APA Minority Fellowship Program  
1200-17th St., NW  
Washington, DC 20036

#### American Sociological Association One-year renewable fellowships:

for minority group members beginning or continuing graduate study in sociology.

Director

ASA Minority Fellowship Program  
1722 N St., NW  
Washington, DC 20036

#### American Fund for Dental Health

**Scholarships:** up to \$2000 to support minority students for first-year dental school and second year upon reapplication and report of satisfactory progress.

Director

American Fund for Dental Health  
211 E. Chicago Ave  
Suite 1630  
Chicago, IL 60611

#### American Indian Fellowship Program

**Graduate fellowships:** for American Indians studying medicine, law, education, natural resources, business administration and engineering.

AIF Program

Office of Indian Education U.S. Dept. of Education  
400 Maryland Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20202

#### Committee on Institutional Cooperation

**(CIC):** Offers four-year awards to one of the following areas: social sciences, humanities, science mathematics, and engineering. Recipients must pursue the Ph.D. degree at a member CIC university.

CIC Minority

Fellowship Program  
Kirkwood Hall III  
Indiana University  
Bloomington, IN 47405

#### Consortium for Graduate Study in

**Management:** Fellowships to support minority students studying for the MBA at a Consortium institution.

Consortium for

Graduate Study in Management  
101 N. Skinker Blvd.  
Box 1132  
St. Louis, MO 63130

<b>Council for Opportunity in Graduate Management Education (COGME):</b> Offers fellowship support to minority students pursuing the master's degree in management at member institutions.	Council for Opportunities in Graduate Management Education Central Plaza 675 Massachusetts Ave. Cambridge, MA 02139
<b>Council on Legal Education Opportunity:</b> Fellowship program for ethnic minorities pursuing advanced degrees in underrepresented disciplines (other than Med degrees)	Council on Legal Education Opportunity 818 18th St. Suite 940, NW Washington, DC 20006
<b>National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering, Inc., (GEM):</b> Offers portable fellowships which can be used at member universities to pursue the M.S. degree in engineering	Grad. Engineering for Minorities GEM P.O. Box 537 Notre Dame, IN 46556
<b>National Medical Fellowship:</b> For support of first and second year medical school study leading to the M.D. or D.D. degree.	National Medical Fellowship, Inc 250 West 57th St. New York, NY 10019
<b>National Science Foundation Graduate Minority Fellowship:</b> For ethnic minorities underrepresented in advanced levels of the U.S. science personnel pool.	Fellowship Office National Research Council 2101 Constitution Ave., NW Washington, DC 20418

Most of the fellowship programs listed require American citizenship and are designed to support American Indians, Black Americans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans.

**F**or those students who desire additional information, these publications should be available in the college library or you might want to write for your own copy.

**A Selected List of Fellowship Opportunities and Aid to Advanced Education.** Single copy free. Available from The Publication Office, National Science Foundation, 1800 G Street, NW, Washington, DC 20550.

**Guide to Corporate Support of Graduate Education.** Single copy \$7.00, prepaid. Available from Council For Financial Aid to Education, 680 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

**Graduate and Professional School Opportunity for Minority Students.** Single copy free. Available from the Educational Testing Services, Princeton, NJ. 08540.

**A Selected List of Post-Secondary Education Opportunities For Minorities and Women.** U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Bureau of Higher Education, Room 4913, ROB-3, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202.

**I**s it appropriate to call for information or to get answers for certain questions I might have?

Yes, it is perfectly okay to call the graduate school or department of interest to request information or to have questions answered. However, in requesting general descriptive information on programs or application materials, a brief letter or postcard is less expensive and time consuming for the school.

Should you need to phone, be sure before placing the call that you have thought out what your informational needs are. Bear in mind that if you ask general questions this will more than likely result in your being given a general response.

When phoning, dial direct and try to have the name of someone to ask for. After the call, record the names of all people with whom you speak.

## ADMISSION

**H**ow do I apply for admission?

When you are certain which universities have the program you want, write the graduate school or department and ask to be sent all necessary application materials. The application process can be lengthy and complex.

As you read through the application materials and program brochures, you should be looking for answers to the following general questions.

- When should I apply?
- Do I need to take any of the graduate or professional standardized tests before admission? Which one?
- Should I make a campus visit? When?
- What criteria is used in admission decisions? What is most important/least important?
- What if I don't meet all the standard criteria for admission, are there alternative admission programs?
- Who will make the decision on my application?
- When and how will I know if I have been accepted for admission?

**S**uccessfully negotiating the admissions process will take careful planning and follow-through. The suggestions that follow should be helpful in working through the process.

Some helpful hints to remember:

- Research your program to seek specific information on the department, school or college in which you have interest
- Keep a folder with all pertinent application information
- Mark and observe **all** test, application and financial aid deadlines.
- Take the appropriate test and have scores sent to universities where you plan to make application.
- Check to make certain that your transcript is complete and accurate.
- Write a statement of purpose outlining your goals, objectives, and interests in attempting graduate school.
- Study the application form before starting to fill it out
- Make sure the application is filled out completely, accurately, and neatly.
- Keep copies of all materials you mail.



# GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICANT CALENDAR CHECKLIST

## What to do in the spring of your junior year

Date Completed

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Take appropriate examination, or register for the October testing date. **Don't** plan to take the test after November of the senior year, it's too late.

Get advice from professors and order catalogues and program descriptions to decide where you wish to apply.

Register with the Minority Locator Service if you want to receive information from a variety of graduate schools during the summer and early fall.

Talk with the professors who will write recommendations for you to inform them of your plans and to solicit their support and advice.

## What to do in the summer before your senior year

Date Completed

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Write for admission application.

Write for financial aid information

Draft a general statement of purpose outlining your motivation and goals for graduate school

Verify that your transcript is up-to-date, accurate, and complete.

## What to do in the fall of your senior year

Date Completed

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Make a list of requirements, deadlines, etc. for each place you plan to submit an application

Have recommendations written and mailed for each application **on time**.

Order undergraduate transcripts and have them mailed for each application **on time**.

Make sure that your test scores have been sent to each school where you have applied.

Fill out application forms and file with each school at least a month before the final deadline.

Double-check with the admissions office or graduate school to which you have applied to make sure each of your applications has been received and is complete.



**T**

To how many schools should I apply to insure admission?

The actual number of schools you apply to will depend upon the number of places in the entering class at the particular school of interest and the competitiveness of the program into which you hope to be admitted. For instance, some programs such as medicine, dentistry, law, clinical psychology, etc. are very competitive and often set limits on the number of places in the entering class. Because of this, students interested in these fields should expect to face stiff competition and therefore should be prepared to apply to a large number of schools.

The best way to insure that you get into a graduate school (not necessarily your first choice) is to apply to a varied group of schools where your chances for admission might range from "almost impossible" to "almost a sure-admit." You can enhance your chances for admission by seeking out those schools that are looking for you.

**H**

How much weight is given to one's GPA during evaluation of applications for admissions?

A number of factors – standardized test score results, analysis of undergraduate transcript, personal goal statement, academic references, personal interview, etc. – are used to assess the potential of an applicant. Of these, however, the single most important factor is the undergraduate academic transcript – GPA.

For this reason, it is imperative that minority students put special emphasis on their academic performance as undergraduates and this is true across all courses; even those not well liked or held in high regard in terms of future benefits.

Students who have done well as undergraduates – "B" average or better – will usually find that the graduate admission committees give more weight to the GPA and less to other factors. This is particularly true regarding minority students and the weight given to academic performance vs. standardized test score results. Here, it is a good idea to make sure the committee is aware of your ethnicity.



**W**

hich admissions examination will I need?

Most universities use scores from standardized examinations as one criteria for admission. The particular type of examination needed depends on the graduate school or professional program for which you are seeking admission.

Listed below are some of the most widely used tests by various universities/professional schools. Registration materials, test dates and deadlines are available in the graduate division or advising center of most universities or you may write directly to the test services for this information.

**Graduate and Professional School Test**

**Graduate Record Examination (GRE)**

Educational Testing Service  
P.O. Box 955  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
(609) 921-9000

**Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)**

Educational Testing Service  
P.O. Box 955  
Princeton, NJ 08540  
(609) 771-7330

**Dental Admission Test (DAT)**

Division of Educational Measurements  
American Dental Association  
211 East Chicago Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611  
(312) 440-2686

**Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)**

Law School Admissions Services  
P.O. Box 2000  
Newtown, PA 18940  
(215) 968-1100

**Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)**

American College Testing Program  
P.O. Box 168  
Iowa City, IA 52243  
(319) 337-1276

### **Optometry College Admission Test (OCAT)**

The Psychological Corporation  
304 East 45th Street  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 888-3207

### **Miller Analogies Test (MAT)**

304 East 45th Street  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 888-3207

Students should not take any of the standardized examinations cold, but should prepare for them. The best way to do this is alone and through the use of any of several study manuals or test-preparation books available through the library or a good bookstore on "How to prepare for the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, etc." In addition to these, you can write to the testing agency for sample tests.

When registering for the particular exam needed, be certain to correctly code in the institution which you wish to receive your scores. Check with the institution to be sure they receive them.

**W**hat about letters of recommendation?

Most graduate schools and/or financial aid programs require supporting letters of recommendation. Generally, such letters should be written by faculty members who are familiar with your academic work and ability.

As a rule, letters of recommendation from employers don't count as much as those from professors, unless your job relates directly to what you plan to study in graduate school. Before asking a person to provide a letter of recommendation, be sure the person knows your ability and is willing to write a positive statement.

A wise student will talk with the person first before making the request for recommendation. This will allow you to acquaint the person with the program to which you are applying and something about your plans and goals.

Usually, letter writers are required to submit their recommenda-

tions directly to the school or program to which you are applying. Carefully check the instructions sent with each application to make sure you know the procedure for having the recommendations sent. When you make the request for the recommendation, be sure to leave the writer a stamped and addressed envelope for his or her use. It is the applicant's responsibility to make sure the letter writer submits the recommendation **on time**.

## H [REDACTED] ow important is the preadmission personal interview?

The preadmission personal interview is very important and can improve a student's chances for admission by bringing out some qualities that might not have been apparent through the written portion of the application.

Therefore, students should not view the interview as solely a time to seek answers to personal concerns but also as an opportunity to market themselves.

If for any reason (personal or financial) a student cannot get to the interview, arrangements should be made to satisfy this phase of the admission process. In all cases, the onus is on the student to make certain that the admissions officer understands the situation and is willing to adjust this part of the process.





## A

Are there application fees?

Most schools require an application fee for persons applying to graduate school. This fee is used to defray the cost of processing the application. Be sure you know how much is required.

In some cases where financial hardship can be demonstrated, the graduate school may waive the application fee.

If you feel that you qualify for a fee waiver, contact the graduate school and request a fee waiver application. Along with filing the fee waiver application, you will probably need some documentation of your financial status.

## H

ow should I prepare my statement of purpose?

Applications for graduate school sometimes include a section titled "Statement of Purpose." This is designed for the applicant to express a reason for choosing a particular specialty, department or school - it's a sample of the applicant's writing and thinking skills, motivation for graduate work, and research interest.

The departmental faculty (admissions committee) reviewing the application will use your statement to weigh your level of commitment and to decide whether your goals are compatible with their program.

It is, therefore, very important that you follow the directions, present the statement in the format given and make it the length requested. It should be concise and well-written. Before submitting the statement, have it critiqued and edited by a professor or advisor.

## H

ow should I handle being offered admission to more than one institution?

If you are fortunate enough to receive acceptance for study at more than one institution, you should decide as soon as possible from among your choices which to attend. When you have made a decision, notify the institutions not selected of your decision and thank each for considering your application. You should also notify the school of choice of your decision to accept and of your intention to enroll.



# A

Are there any general tips for fellowship/assistantship recipients? When a student requests and receives aid from an agency, foundation, school, etc., he/she assumes a professional responsibility to:

- Put forth his/her best effort to excel and complete the program in a timely fashion.
- Provide the sponsoring organization with information and/or reports as required.
- Keep the sponsoring organization informed of any changes in plans, program, address, phone number, etc.

There are certain practices that are considered unprofessional and should be avoided if at all possible. Among these are:

- Delayed replies to offers of fellowship or financial aid while the student shops around for other offers.
- Acceptance of a fellowship and then later turning it down after it is too late to find another student replacement.
- Failure to abide by the terms of the fellowship.
- Failure to work up to potential.



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## GLOSSARY

Important terms used in discussion of graduate education

**Assistantship:** A form of financial aid in which the graduate student is paid for work performed; work which is often related to the student's studies or area of specialization. A *research assistantship* or "RA" pays a student to assist a professor on an experiment or research project; a *teaching assistantship* or "TA" pays a student to teach sections or classes of undergraduate courses, or to help grade papers or examinations.

**Committee:** This may refer to one of several types of important committees.

1. *Admissions committee.* Applications for graduate school are considered, and admission decisions made by, a committee of faculty members within an academic department. Students applying to an engineering department, for example, will be admitted or denied by the admissions committee composed of faculty members in engineering, rather than by a central admissions director within the university's administration.
2. *Dissertation or examination committee* A committee of faculty members usually chosen by the graduate student from within his or her department or from within closely related departments, to help the student plan the dissertation or determine the general content of the qualifying examination or final dissertation defense. These committees usually serve both as advisers to the student and as examiners on the material studied or research performed.

**Completion Rate:** Of the students entering a particular graduate department in the same year, the percentage who ultimately complete the degree for which they enrolled.

**Defense:** This is the final examination on a graduate student's dissertation, and the final requirement for the Ph.D. The defense may take one of several forms, such as a lecture on the dissertation topic, or a formal oral ex-

amination. The graduate student explains and defends for informed questioners the accuracy and significance of the research and arguments in his or her thesis.

**Director of Graduate Study:** Also called *Graduate Adviser*, etc. The faculty member in a department who is responsible for disseminating information about the graduate program, answering questions from the applicants, and advising graduate students who have not yet selected a dissertation topic. The Director of Graduate Study usually sits on or chairs the departmental admissions committee, and is the best source of information for the potential applicant.

**Discipline:** A broad field of study, such as psychology, physics, English, or computer science.

**Dissertation:** The independent project conducted by a graduate student after completing coursework and general examinations. The dissertation will vary in form and length depending on the discipline and the nature of the research project; it usually requires from one to three years to complete. The dissertation is supposed to show mastery of knowledge and research tools, and should contribute something new to the discipline in which it is written.

**Doctorate (doctoral):** Another word for the Ph.D. or Doctor of Philosophy degree. Those who earn the Ph.D. are entitled to use the title "Doctor."

**Fellowship (fellow):** A fellowship is a form of financial aid comparable to a college scholarship. It is a grant of money for which no work is required, and can cover part or all of tuition and may include an additional stipend for supporting the student while he/she is in graduate school.

**GAPSFAS:** *The Graduate And Professional School Financial Aid Service* The GAPSFAS form is a standardized, detailed financial aid form many graduate schools ask applicants to complete if they apply for financial aid. GAPSFAS is a department of Educational Testing Service.

**GRE:** *The Graduate Record Examination* is for graduate school applicants what the SAT is for college applicants. It is a standardized test designed by Educational Testing Service to measure knowledge and skills; it is scored on a 200 - 800 scale. The GRE Aptitude Test has three sections: verbal, quantitative, and analytical. There are also GRE Advanced Tests in specific disciplines, such as French, mathematics, philosophy, engineering, etc. GRE scores are often an admissions application requirement.

**General Examination:** This is also called the preliminary or qualifying examination. The general exam tests the depth and breadth of a graduate student's knowledge in his or her discipline. It may be written or oral, is often divided into sections corresponding to special fields within the discipline, and is usually taken after the completion of coursework. The student prepares for it independently. After passing "generals" or "qualifiers" the student begins work on the dissertation.

**Locator Service:** See MGSLs

**Master's Degree:** The degree of professional certification in a field, following the Bachelor's. A master's curriculum usually rests on one to three years of course work and may involve a thesis or limited research project as the final requirement. The master's is *not* often a prerequisite for admission to a Ph.D. program.

**MGSLs:** A service offered free to minority students by Educational Testing Service's GRE Department. Students who provide certain information about themselves, their academic backgrounds, and educational goals are included on lists requested by graduate schools participating in the service. A student who signs up for the Locator Service makes him or herself available for recruitment by graduate schools which offer an appropriate program. (Stands for *Minority Graduate Student Locator Service*.)

**NDSL:** *National Direct Student Loan*; a federal program through which loans are available to eligible graduate students.

**Orals:** See *Defense or General Examination*. Depending on the institution, either may be called "orals."

**Outside Fellowship:** A fellowship awarded by a source outside of the student's university or graduate department, such as a corporation, government, or foundation.

**Ph.D.:** The Doctor of Philosophy degree, a research degree the curriculum for which usually involves coursework, special and general examinations, a major research project leading to the writing of a dissertation, and defense of the dissertation. The Ph.D. can require between three, six or seven years to complete, depending on the discipline, institutional policies, and the student's preparedness.

**Postdoctoral Fellowship ("POSTDOC")**: A type of position available in some disciplines (especially sciences) to individuals who have just completed the Ph.D. and wish to continue research in a university without having to assume teaching responsibilities.

**Preliminary Examination:** See *General Examination*

**Professional Degree:** The degree which certifies one for entrance into a particular profession, such as law (JD) or medicine (MD). The Master's is the professional degree for many areas: the MA, MS, or MEd for primary or secondary teaching, for example; the MBA for business, the MArch for Architecture, the MSE for Engineering. The professional degree does not generally have major research as a component, and frequently has a largely prescribed curriculum.

**Proposal:** Also called a *prospectus*. A statement or paper in which the graduate student proposes to his or her depart-

mental committee a dissertation topic and details what the dissertation will accomplish, and how the research will be conducted. The proposal must be approved before work on the dissertation formally begins.

**Qualifying Examination:** See *General Examination*

**Reader:** A professor responsible for advising, reading, and finally approving a graduate student's dissertation. A student usually has two or three readers (the "first" reader being the main adviser), all of whom have some special interest or expertise in the student's special field, and are thus in a good position to help supervise the research and writing of the dissertation.

**Research Degree:** A degree, like the Ph.D., which prepares the student for a career in research, scholarship, and college or university teaching. The program of study requires substantial independent research and presentation of the results in a dissertation.

**Stipend:** A grant of money to a graduate student for use toward expenses above tuition and fees. Graduate fellowships sometimes pay both tuition and a stipend which can be applied toward living expenses.

**Thesis:** A research paper presented as a major, and usually final, requirement of a degree program. Thesis is sometimes used interchangeably with "dissertation," referring to Ph.D. research; more often it refers to a project more limited in scope, completed as a Master's requirement.

This glossary of terms was adapted from a list compiled by the Committee on Opportunities for Minorities in Graduate Education, Science and Engineering, Cambridge, MA, 1980.